

Mother of troubled child thanks Big Lottery for its help

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The mother of a troubled teenager who was helped by a Big Lottery-funded scheme is encouraging other community groups to apply for money from the body. Kerry Spurling spoke following an announcement from the Big Lottery that it has made millions of pounds available to groups and charities to help them through the recession.

She said the good work Derby City Council's Engage Programme had done with 13-year-old son Mitchell was proof of what could be achieved by groups with the right funding. Engage was granted £282,625 by the Big Lottery last September, which has been broken down into payments that it will receive quarterly over a two-year period.

The programme works with troubled young people aged 10 to 16 and their parents, offering a range of activities from music production and acting to rock climbing. Families are referred for help by schools and social services when children have, for example, been expelled from school or received a police caution. Mitchell and his mum were sent on a seven-week outward bound course to improve his behaviour after his school, Merrill College, referred him to the scheme.

Mrs Spurling, 34, of Leys Field Gardens, Chellaston, said it had changed her son's outlook on life and that he had now settled down at school. She said: "He was abusive. He was fighting all the time and he wouldn't sit down to do any work.

"A lot of it was anger. He had been to court for fighting outside of school as well and was given four months' probation."

"I had been told that he was on the verge of being expelled unless we did something."

She said the outward bound scheme at Darley Barn, in Darley Abbey, ran weekly sessions at which she and Mitchell took part in activities like rock climbing, canoeing and abseiling. She said: "It was brilliant. We were already close but it made us even closer."

"It gave him an outlet and showed him people wanted to help him. I'm not hearing about trouble at school so much."

The Engage Project has helped about 200 individuals like Mitchell and Kerry since it started in September last year. Mrs Spurling said she wanted to thank Engage, Merrill College and the Big Lottery for making the course possible and said other community groups should take advantage of money from the body.

Last month, the Big Lottery announced it would be increasing funding through its reaching communities programme by £20m over the coming year, bringing the total available to charities and volunteer groups up to £80m.

Community groups looking to apply for funding should call the body's advice line on 08454 102030 or visit www.biglotteryfund.org.uk.